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ABSTRACT

The Community College Transfer Opportunity Program (CCTOP) was established in 1990 to help students at 11 participating community colleges transfer to and complete their baccalaureate degrees at New York University's (NYU's) School of Education. Since 1990, the program has enabled over 450 students to transfer to NYU, while the retention rate for full-time CCTOP students is 87%. CCTOP was specifically designed to help transfer students overcome three obstacles: the loss of credits, the cost of attending NYU, and the difficulties inherent in entering a large and intimidating institution. The first issue was addressed by writing individual transfer agreements that guaranteed that students who follow a given curriculum may transfer at least 60 credits to a related program of study. These agreements also guarantee that students will not have to repeat a course already successfully completed at their community college. The second issue was addressed by positioning CCTOP not as a transfer program, but as a scholarship program. Each year, community college faculty and counselors nominate 11 students for an $8,000 scholarship. To help transfer students adjust to the large university, CCTOP designated a specific liaison for the program at NYU's Office of Student Services and provides personalized attention to all students who contact the CCTOP office. Other factors involved in the program's success include support from top-level administration down, the assistance of community college transfer counselors and faculty, good communications between parties, and active and dedicated students. (HAA)

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Perspectives from the Field: The Community College Transfer Opportunity Program

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New York University School of Education
Center for Urban Community College Leadership
Successful Community College Transfer Conference
Session: Perspectives from the Field

I am very pleased to have the opportunity this afternoon to talk a little bit about a very successful transfer program based not in a community college, but right here at the NYU School of Education. The Community College Transfer Opportunity Program aka CCTOP helps students at eleven tri-state area community colleges transfer and complete their baccalaureate degrees in a wide variety of majors offered by the NYU School of Education.

Since 1990 CCTOP has enabled more than 450 students, 41% of whom are African-American, Hispanic, or Latino to transfer to NYU. The retention rate for full-time CCTOP students is 87%. And to our knowledge at least 20% of our graduates have either completed master's degrees or are currently enrolled in graduate programs.

When Lindsay Wright and Martin Moed began working together in 1989 to create CCTOP, they structured a program that addressed what they determined to be the three key obstacles that community college students wanting to transfer to NYU would have to overcome:

1) the loss of credits
2) the cost of attending NYU and
3) the difficulty negotiating a large and sometimes intimidating institution

The first issue--loss of credits--was addressed by writing over 250 individual transfer agreements that guaranteed that students who followed a given curriculum could transfer at least (not up to) 60 credits to a related program of study. In order to be able to make this offer, School of Education faculty had to agree to loosen the liberal arts requirements so that instead of requiring students to complete courses in 12 academic areas CCTOP students

would only be required to satisfy 9 or 10 areas, depending on the major. These agreements also guaranteed that students would not have to repeat a course already successfully completed at their community college.

Soon after the program began, we came to recognize that many students do not follow a one curriculum or have been to two, three, or even four colleges, so in addition to the more general transfer agreements, we began to offer prospective students pre-admission transfer credit evaluations so that students could know in advance exactly how their courses would transfer to a particular program at NYU.

We also work with students who are losing credits because they are changing majors. For example, there was a Westchester Community College student in automotive tech who decided he wanted to become a math teacher. We worked with his transfer counselor to devise a package of courses that he took at Westchester so that he could then transfer to NYU and complete his degree in two years. He did in fact transfer, and is now teaching math at Norman Thomas High School in Manhattan and is also about to complete his master's degree.

The second issue CCTOP addresses is the cost of attending NYU.
For many students, particularly first generation college students, the assumed cost of attending NYU is enough to stop the transfer process before it begins. We overcame that obstacle, at least in part, by positioning CCTOP not as a transfer program but as a scholarship program. Each year faculty and counselors at all eleven community colleges

participating in CCTOP receive a letter asking them to nominate qualified students for an $8,000 CCTOP Scholarship. Students who are nominated receive a letter, an admissions application, and a memo waiving their $45 application fee.

Positioning CCTOP as a Scholarship program has not only helped to ease the financial barrier to transfer but it has helped to ease the psychological barrier as well. Many students at the CCTOP community colleges have a strong positive image of NYU. Some students who never intended to transfer are motivated when they learn that there's a possibility of transferring to NYU. Some students and I quote, "always dreamed of going to NYU but never thought I could get in." When they discover that there is a special program to help them transfer and that we are also offering them scholarship assistance, they begin to have a different view of themselves and of their academic opportunities.

Now I don't mean to be overly optimistic--it doesn't work for all students. I'll never forget one of my first conversations with a community college student, a young woman, who had been offered admission to NYU along with a sizeable scholarship but told me she would not be attending for financial reasons. As we continued the conversation, the real reason for her not transferring to NYU emerged--she felt that she wouldn't be able to do the work--that she would not be academically successful at NYU. When I pointed out that she had a 3.8 GPA her response was "but it's from a community college." I have heard versions of this enough to convince me that this is an issue that community colleges might want to seek ways to address.

Let me move on to the third obstacle--helping students negotiate a large and sometimes intimidating University. During the initial year of the Program, we tried to do this primarily by using existing personnel and the School's office of student services. It became clear that in order to be successful, we would have to designate one person who would serve as a liaison for CCTOP--what we like to call the one-stop shopping model. And it's been very effective.

Students who call the CCTOP office get very personalized attention. We realize that the first contact a student has with the University makes a strong impression so we try to be as informative and welcoming as possible (which I'm afraid to say is not always the response when a student calls the admissions or financial aid office). As Director of the Program I am available to all students from the time they inquire or are nominated through the transfer and financial aid process until the time they graduate. Once they enroll, although each student has an academic advisor, we monitor their progress and intercede when appropriate. Students know that I am available whenever they have a question that they cannot find the answer to or when they are getting conflicting information, or have a problem they cannot solve through regular channels.

Now I need to be honest because I know this sounds very labor intensive. In reality, of the 200 CCTOP students currently enrolled, maybe two or three dozen will come to see me in any given semester. For most of the students, our one-on-one contact ends when they enroll. I typically call all students during their first semester to see how things are going, and then for the most part they are fully integrated into the University.

Those are the three basic components of the Program and three of the major reasons CCTOP is a successful transfer program. But let me briefly share a few of the many additional reasons CCTOP is a success.

1) Top-Down Support. CCTOP has the full support of our Dean at NYU and the support of the Presidents at each of the participating community colleges. This was particularly important during the early stages of the program.

2) Transfer Counselor and Faculty Support. CCTOP depends heavily on transfer counselors and community college faculty to nominate and encourage students to apply to NYU. From time to time a transfer counselor leaves or has an extended illness, and we see an immediate decline in the number of students who transfer in that particular year.

3) Communications. We try very hard to keep everyone involved in the program informed. Faculty who nominate students receive a copy of the letter we send to their nominees, transfer counselors get copies of all letters sent to students, we do an annual enrollment report to each of the colleges, we have an annual transfer counselor meeting at NYU. And this may sound trite but I get a lot of feedback about this from both students and faculty--WE RETURN PHONE CALLS--ALWAYS.

And lastly but certainly not least, CCTOP is successful because of our students. We have been able to attract an incredible group of community college students who have for the most part already overcome obstacles much greater than those they encounter in transferring. Once they are at NYU, CCTOP students are very active. Our Elementary Ed Club and Applied Psychology Club were both founded by CCTOP students. Three CCTOP students

are currently participating in our Americorps Project, while two others have been chosen to be R.A.s--residence hall assistants--very competitive and coveted positions. Academically, CCTOP students are among some of the brightest. In 1993, a Kingsborough Community College transfer student, a single mother, was our valedictory speaker. Dozens of CCTOP students have graduated with honors, and one of this year's graduates is the first CCTOP student that we know of enrolled in a Ph.D. Program. So ultimately, CCTOP is a success because our students have come to NYU prepared to succeed.